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**Our Lord's
Virgin Birth**
and the
**Criticism
of To-day.**



By
R. J. KNOWLING, D.D.

Servus Christi Virgin Route.

24

OUR LORD'S VIRGIN BIRTH

AND THE

CRITICISM OF TO-DAY.

BY

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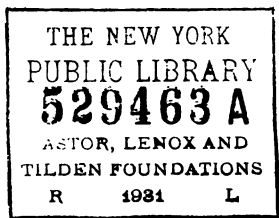
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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE following papers appeared in the *Churchman*, in the earlier part of 1903, by the kindness of the Dean of Canterbury, and the writer owes a debt of gratitude to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for reprinting them. Since they were written, several valuable contributions have been published on the same subject, and amongst them may be mentioned the Dean of Westminster's "Some Thoughts on the Incarnation;" Dr. Sanday's lecture in "Critical Questions;" Dr. Chase's pamphlet to which reference is made on p. 95; Dr. Randolph's "Our Lord's Virgin Birth;" and the reprint of an essay by Dr. Orr on "The Miraculous Conception and Modern Thought," in his essays on Ritschlianism.


We are promised a translation of Professor Lobstein's "Dogma of the Virgin Birth," and one or two references are made to its original and apparently shorter form in the following pages, as also to Professor Usener's article on

the Birth of Jesus, reproduced in the present year from the "Encyclopædia Biblica," in the first number of the *Zeitschrift für die neueste Wissenschaft*. Several of the statements made in these two papers appear to have been anticipated and refuted, in the judgment of the present writer, in an able anonymous pamphlet published in 1896, entitled "Geboren von der Jungfrau" (Leipzig).

No attempt has been made in these pages to deal with the scientific facts of parthenogenesis; but for those interested in this aspect of the question, Dr. Orr's note (p. 225) in the above-named essay may be consulted, with his reference to the words of Professor Romanes; and with these comments may be compared the criticism of Sir W. Dawson, in "Modern Ideas of Evolution," p. 39.

In relation to another aspect of the question, Bishop Westcott's remarks in his recently published "Life and Letters," ii. p. 308, will be read with special interest (see p. 68).

The present writer would venture to refer to the "Witness of the Epistles," pp. 274-290, for an earlier treatment of the literature of the subject.



OUR LORD'S VIRGIN BIRTH

AND THE

CRITICISM OF TO-DAY.

I.

“JESUS, the son of the carpenter Joseph and his wife Mary, was born in Nazareth.” These are the words with which Professor Otto Schmiedel commences his summary of the chief problems of the life of Jesus in an expansion of a lecture published last year, delivered to an audience composed chiefly of educated laymen. They are characteristic of many similar attempts to dismiss, by a short and easy method, the opening statements of the Gospel history, and they remind us of a similar pronouncement with which a famous French sceptic commenced his “Life of Jesus.” From the point of view of both biographers ✓

their statements are not surprising. A writer who lays it down as an absolute rule that a place in history should be denied to miraculous circumstances, or a writer who does his best to reduce as much as possible the significance of the miraculous powers attributed to our Lord, could scarcely be expected to look with favour upon the accounts of the Nativity given us in the New Testament. How far it was likely that the miraculous element in these accounts should have found a place in them, unless it was true, we shall try to consider later. But at the outset it may be observed that the opening narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke are questioned not only for their miraculous elements, but for their historical setting.

A claim, indeed, has recently been made to the discovery of "a key to the famous problem of the birthplace of Jesus" ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Nazareth"). We are reminded that there was not only a Bethlehem-Judah, but also a Bethlehem of Galilee, not far from Nazareth. In the earliest form of the evangelical tradition, Jesus was said to have been born in Bethlehem-

Nazareth, which really means Bethlehem-Galilee,* and the reference is to the Bethlehem mentioned in Josh. xix. 15. The tradition grew, and the title Bethlehem-Nazareth was liable to misunderstanding, so much so that two places—Bethlehem and Nazareth—were quoted as claiming the honour of the birthplace of Jesus. “Bethlehem” by itself was supposed to mean the southern Bethlehem—*i.e.* of Judæa—and hence we may date the rise of our narratives in Matt. ii. and Luke ii. 1–20, “so poetic and so full of spiritual suggestion.” This reference to the poetic nature of the narratives may be left for subsequent consideration; but when we turn to the article “Nativity,” in the same volume, by Professor Usener, we are told that the problem as to the birthplace of Jesus cannot be solved, but is rather complicated, by a reference to Bethlehem of Galilee, and that it is quite as certain that the Bethlehem spoken of in the Gospels as the birthplace was the

* This attempt at identification is drawn out by reference to the Old Testament and the Talmud and Matt. xxvi 69 (*cf.* with 71; John vii. 41); but it is admitted that the proof is not beyond dispute.

Bethlehem in Judæa, as it is that Nazareth was universally accepted as the home of Jesus.* This looks at first sight like a direct contradiction of the statement in the first-named article, but it becomes evident that it is not really so when we are asked in each case "to go behind our present Gospels," and when it is maintained that the opening chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke, as we have them, are composed of interpolations and additions; the oldest written forms of the Gospel knew, and knew only, that Jesus was born at Nazareth, as the son of Joseph and Mary, and Luke commenced his Gospel with the baptism and preaching of John. So flagrant were the contradictions between St. Matthew and St. Luke that the Apocryphal Gospel, the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, was composed at the end of the second century for the purpose of reconciling them! It is no wonder that Dr. Zahn should ask in surprise, "What judgment would these theologians form of the history so inconvenient

* See, to the same effect, the reprint of Usener's article in the *Zeitschrift für die neutest. Wissenschaft*, i. 1903, in which he refers to the "Encycl. Biblica."

to them if the two narratives had agreed entirely in every particular, and had only differed from one another in outward expression? They would unquestionably maintain that they were not two witnesses . . . but only one single witness for the existence of the myth at the time of the Evangelist who first recorded it, if, indeed, he had not invented it entirely himself" ("Das Apostolische Symbolum," p. 58); and he rightly reminds us that, as it is, we have two historical works, designed for entirely different circles of readers, and derived in this, as in many other points, from entirely different sources. If, indeed, any one wished to see what part is played by the most arbitrary and subjective opinions in the modern criticism of the early narratives of St. Matthew and St. Luke, he could scarcely do better than read the three articles, "Mary," "Nativity," "Nazareth," in the same volume of the "Encyclopædia Biblica." Because, *e.g.*, in Matt. i. 18-25 no mention is made of Bethlehem, this section comes to us from a different and a later hand than that to which we owe chap. ii.; as so much has already been shown ✓

to be untenable in Luke i. and ii., "it will, perhaps, be the more readily conceded" that no historical value belongs to the episode of the shepherds, notwithstanding its great poetic beauty!

But to turn back for a moment from these reflections to the light which may be expected to dawn upon us from the Bethlehem-Nazareth theory. If it is true, St. Luke is not only guilty, as we are so constantly assured, of a considerable historical blunder in his setting of circumstances, but also in a considerable geographical blunder, which, however, he shares in this case with the transmitters of "the earliest evangelical tradition." But some hypothesis, it is urged, is absolutely necessary, owing to those glaring contradictions of the Evangelists to which reference has already been made. The hypothesis in the present instance is based on another hypothesis—viz. that in the earliest form of evangelical tradition Jesus was said to have been born at Bethlehem-Nazareth = Bethlehem-Galilee, i.e. the Bethlehem referred to above and mentioned in Josh. xix. 15, and possibly once elsewhere.

There appears, however, to be no vestige of proof forthcoming as to why this should have been the belief, as is apparently maintained, of the earliest Christian circles. There was certainly nothing in the place traditionally to attract any one to settle there, and so far as prophecy is concerned, it would probably be admitted that there was much more to point this early circle of believers to Nazareth, some six miles away from the Bethlehem in question. But then we are asked to take a further step, and to believe that this expression "Bethlehem-Nazareth" came to be misunderstood. At this we cannot well be surprised, and certainly its attempted identification with Bethlehem-Galilee somewhat confuses the ordinary reader to-day.


In consequence, however, of this misunderstanding, and as time went on, some said that Jesus was born at Nazareth, while others said that he was born at Bethlehem, the latter being taken to mean Bethlehem-Judah, as it had no explanatory addition. But if, as the same article maintains, it had been customary to speak of Bethlehem of Nazareth just as one might speak

of Bethlehem-Judah, it is difficult to see why the distinction between the two should not have been maintained, or why the extinction of the "earliest Gospel tradition" should have been so easily effected. If it be urged that the reference to Bethlehem of Judah was the more likely to commend itself, since prophecy had fixed the birthplace of the Messiah in the city of David, we need not dispute it. But it must be remembered that in this same article we are asked to avoid exaggerating the influence of Old Testament prophecy on the traditional narratives of the life of Jesus, and that we are also told by the same writer (art. "Joseph") that the author of the fourth Gospel apparently did not accept this tradition of Bethlehem-Judah, and that for him Nazareth marked the origin of Jesus. If, however, this fourth Gospel, as we are further asked to believe, was produced at some period shortly before 140 A.D. (see Professor Schmiedel, "Encycl. Biblica," ii. art. "John," 2551), it would seem, on this interpretation of St. John's words, that the tradition that the birthplace of Jesus was at Nazareth still had its adherents,

and that it still formed part of the belief of a not unimportant section of believers. But if so, it is strange that before 132 A.D., at all events, Bethlehem of Judah and not Nazareth was regarded beyond all reasonable doubt in popular tradition as the birthplace of Jesus. "It is significant," writes Professor G. A. Smith, "that Bethlehem appears to have been chosen, along with the sites of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, for special treatment by the Emperor Hadrian. As he set up an image of Jupiter and of Venus, so he devastated Bethlehem, and planted upon it a grove sacred to Adonis. This proves that even before 132 A.D. Bethlehem was the scene of Christian pilgrimage and worship as the birthplace of Jesus" (art. "Bethlehem," in "Encycl. Biblica," i.).* The truth is that Bethlehem of Judah became what it was, and what it is, for Christian hearts, not merely from the fact that prophecy had pointed to it, but from the additional fact that prophecy had been fulfilled in it.

* Even in the fourth century comparatively few pilgrims visited Nazareth, which is strange if it ever had any appreciable reputation as the birthplace of the Lord.

✓ But if St. Luke is guiltless of a geographical blunder in placing our Lord's birth at Bethlehem-Judah, we have still to consider the charge of an historical blunder in the setting of chap. ii. We naturally refer in the first place to Professor Ramsay's well-known and most valuable work, "Was Christ born at Bethlehem?" since it is not only recognised as indispensable in this inquiry by every English writer (*cf.*, *e.g.*, the commendation of the book and its results by Dr. Sanday in his famous article "Jesus Christ," Hastings' "Bibl. Dict.," ii. 646), but is referred to as presenting us with the most likely solution of a difficult problem by Zöckler, in what we may call a corresponding article to that of Dr. Sanday in the new edition of Herzog's "Encyclopædia;" whilst H. Holtzmann, in his new edition of the "Synoptic Gospels" ("Hand-Commentar," i. 315), has discussed it from an adverse point of view. The word for "enrolment," Luke ii. 2, or its plural, was the word for the periodic enrolments which beyond all doubt were made in Egypt, probably initiated by Augustus. These enrolments were numberings of the people



according to households, and had nothing to do with the valuation for purposes of taxation. But Egypt, says Holtzmann, is not Syria. In the first place, however, it is no unfair inference that such enrolments would not be confined to any one part of the Roman "world," in which Palestine was included, but that they would rather form part of a deliberate and general policy under a ruler so systematic as Augustus.* In the next place, Professor Ramsay not only makes it very probable that such enrolments were actually extended to Syria, but he rightly emphasizes the peculiarly delicate and difficult position of Herod, which bound him not only to comply with the imperial policy, but also to regard the prejudices and suspicions of the fanatical people whom he ruled. From this point of view it is a very fair inference that whilst Herod would obey the orders of Augustus, he would nevertheless conduct

* In this connection it is interesting to note that Dr. Percy Gardner writes, "One or two definite, though not conclusive pieces of evidence, seem to indicate that this periodical census was not confined to Egypt, but was in some cases, at all events, extended to Syria" ("Encycl. Biblica," art. "Quirinius," 3996).

the enrolment on national lines, that he would give it a tribal and family character, to bring it as far as he could into accord with Jewish sentiment.* Here probably lies the true distinction between the first enrolment, which was one of a series, and *the* enrolment (mentioned in Acts v. 37), which was conducted after the Roman fashion, and became the cause, not only of indignation, but of rebellion; here, too, is the probable explanation as to why Joseph and the Virgin Mother left their home at Nazareth for Bethlehem: no necessity for the journey would have arisen if the enrolment had been conducted on Roman lines, inasmuch as in that case only a recognition of existing political and social facts would have been involved. So far, then, is St. Luke from confusing this enrolment of Herod's with the subsequent enrolment of 6, 7 A.D.—as not only Schmiedel, but Pfeiderer, in the new edition of his "Urchristentum," would have us believe—a confusion which would involve a

* Cf. to the same effect as to Jewish national feeling the remarks of B. Weiss in the last edition (1902) of his famous *Jesus*, i. 231.

blunder of some ten years, that he carefully distinguishes between them, and explains at the outset that the Roman method was modified by the introduction of a numbering, not only of households, but of tribes. No doubt Professor Ramsay's theory is still not free from difficulties. It would seem, *e.g.*, that the first of the series of enrolments commenced in Syria about 9 B.C., a year which would be considerably at variance with the common reckoning of the year of our Lord's birth. Professor Ramsay, however, supposes that the enrolment which ought to have been made thus early, or at latest 8 B.C., was delayed for a couple of years on account of the peculiar circumstances of Herod, and the peculiar temperament of the people whom he was called upon to govern.

And here, in connection with recent important literature, it may be noted that Mr. Turner ("Chronology," Hastings' "Bibl. Dict.," i. 404) is in agreement with Professor Ramsay in the belief that St. Luke may well have been quite correct in his mention of a census (ii. 1). There is no improbability, he thinks, in the hypothesis of a


llc.

census in Judæa somewhere within the years 8–5 B.C. Statistics of the resources of the Empire were, as he points out, a favourite study of Augustus, and if Herod (as, apparently, other client Kings) was bidden to supply them, he may well have been mindful of the susceptibilities of the Jewish nation, “and so, in avoiding the scandal caused by the later census (Acts v. 37), he avoided also the notice of history.” But whilst Mr. Turner thus admits the probability of the census in Luke ii. 1, he regards the Evangelist as in error in the name Quirinius. He fully allows that Quirinius may have been twice Governor of Syria, not only at the great census (Acts v. 37) which he conducted, but also at an earlier period. But then he points out that this earlier period could not have coincided with the date of our Lord's birth, as Quintilius Varus came into office in the summer of 6 B.C., and was, apparently, still in office at the time of Herod's death, 4 B.C. But does St. Luke say that Quirinius was Governor, *i.e.* Legate, of Syria? The term he uses is quite indefinite, and Professor Ramsay reminds us that it may

simply mean "acting as leader," and may imply that whilst Varus in 6 B.C. was controlling the internal affairs of Syria, Quirinius was holding an extraordinary military command by his side, which might also have involved the control of foreign policy, just as Vespasian conducted a war in Palestine by the side of Mucianus, the governor of Syria, and was called by Tacitus *dux*—a title to which the word used by St. Luke of Quirinius might well correspond. Holtzmann dismisses this explanation of Ramsay's somewhat contemptuously, but he has nothing to say with regard to the analogous cases of a temporary division of duties in Roman administration, or to those quoted by Monsieur R. S. Bour, who is essentially in agreement with Ramsay in the proposed solution.

Since the publication of Professor Ramsay's book we have had, in the fourth volume of Dr. Hastings' "Bibl. Dict.," Dr. Plummer's article "Quirinius." In agreement with much that has been said above, Dr. Plummer points out that the word employed by St. Luke in ii. 2 is quite compatible with the belief that Quirinius held

some military post in Syria even before Herod's death, and that he may have had some share in the census which was proceeding at the time of that event. In this connection he further points out that Justin Martyr refers to Quirinius at the time of the Nativity by a word equivalent to one holding the office of *procurator*, and not by a word signifying *legatus*, as Quirinius afterwards became in 6 A.D. The only other place in which St. Luke uses the word employed in the phrase, "when Quirinius was Governor of Syria," is of a *procurator* (St. Luke iii. 1); and this fact adds weight to the supposition that whilst at the time of the enrolment Varus was actually *legatus*, Quirinius may have held some such command as that indicated above. But in any case, as Dr. Plummer wisely adds, if Christians were bent on inventing a reason for the birth at Bethlehem, it is not at all likely that they would have had recourse to Roman and heathen sources. It may further be observed that when we consider the proofs of St. Luke's correctness elsewhere throughout his two books, it is only fair to judge any difficulties which may remain in connection with



the statement under consideration in the light of that correctness, especially when we remember that we are dealing with a field of history in which, as Bishop Lightfoot so well put it, there was beyond all others room for mistake and blunder—the administration of the Roman Empire and its provinces—and when we further bear in mind that for the age of Augustus our authorities are specially obscure and defective.

When we look into the narrative as it stands, whilst there is very good reason to believe that we owe its charm and simplicity, its modesty and reserve to the Virgin Mother herself, or possibly, as Dr. Sanday suggests, to one of the group of women mentioned in Luke viii. 3, xxiv. 10, it may be noted in passing, although it would be precarious to lay too much stress upon it, that the narrative is marked in some places by the language characteristic of a medical man (see, *e.g.*, the instances endorsed by Dr. Zahn, "Einleitung," ii., p. 435, amongst others cited by Hobart). And if this is so, it is a fair inference that we are not only concerned with a careful and cultured writer, who had made it his business

to trace the course of all things accurately from the first, but that he did not hesitate to include among these things the incidents connected with the birth of the Baptist and of the Christ, although by his very profession he would be inclined to accept some of those details with considerable reserve, unless he had some due assurance of their truth. The remarkable chapter in which Professor Ramsay endeavours to show that Mary herself is the primary authority throughout would only lose by quotation, and it should be studied in its entirety. The same view has, of course, been held by various scholars previously, but it may well be doubted if it has ever been previously presented with so much beauty and feeling. It is easy to assure us that the attempt to derive these fine touches belongs to homiletics rather than to historical research, but even if we may hesitate to endorse Professor Ramsay's condemnation of the man who fails to catch the tone of a mother's heart in Luke ii. 19, 51 as one who deliberately shuts his mind against all literary feeling, we can fully agree with him that the historian who wrote like that believed

that he had the authority of the mother herself (see the arguments to the same effect in Zahn, "Einleitung," ii. p. 404).

But if it is a woman who speaks to us in these chapters, it is also a Jewish, or rather a Jewish-Christian, woman, one who stands, as it were, upon the borderland between the old Dispensation and the New, full of the hopes and blessings of Israel, and yet inspired with a grander vision of hope and blessing for the world. The language in which she gives expression to her hopes is not only moulded upon the Old Testament Scriptures, but it approaches, like the other canticles in the first two chapters of St. Luke, very nearly in style and phraseology to the Psalms of Solomon—*i.e.*, to a writing which comes to us as expressive of Jewish thought and feeling, from some half-century or so before the Advent.* But whilst this Jewish thought and feeling are thus assured, and this would be equally the case if we

* Dr. Charles has recently pointed out how the language of Luke i. 55, recalls not only Mic. vii. 23, but also "Book of Jubilees," xxv. 17. See also *Quarterly Review*, Jan., 1903, p. 299.

endorse the attempt to trace them back to the Greek-Jewish prayers of the Hellenistic synagogues—there is still considerable weight in the judgment: “a little less and these songs would be purely Jewish, a little more and they would be purely Christian.” We are assured by Dr. Harnack that these songs are to be attributed to the genius of St. Luke; but if so we can only say that, apart from the improbability that the Greek Luke could have composed them (as Dr. Zahn so strikingly reminds us, “*Einleitung*,” ii. p. 404), the third Evangelist may or not have been a painter, but that he was most certainly a poet, and that, too, a poet whose genius has achieved an influence which no other member of the world's list of poets has even distantly approached. It is not a theologian, but the French sceptic Renan, who can tell us of these canticles, which thus find a place in a book which he described as the most beautiful in the world, that never were sweeter songs composed to put to sleep the sorrows of poor humanity. It may here be well to note in passing that a determined effort has been recently made by

Dr. Harnack and other writers to refer the *Magnificat* not to the Virgin Mother, but to Elizabeth.* But apart from all questions of textual criticism, it still remains true that the words of the *Magnificat*, "the lowliness of His *handmaiden*," are most fitly and naturally connected with the words of Mary to the angel, "behold the *handmaiden* of the Lord"; so, too, the words, "shall call me blessed," with the words of Elizabeth, "*blessed* is she that believed." Dr. Harnack suspects that the canticle was in the first instance attributed to Mary because the words, "all generations shall call me blessed," were considered inappropriate as referring to Elizabeth, and he sees, therefore, in these words only an imitation of the words of Leah (Gen. xxx. 13). But who can fail to contrast the limited scope of Leah's rejoicing circle with the ever-widening circle of "all generations" which shall call Mary blessed?

But a still bolder attempt is made to account

* The arguments for and against this attempt will be found well marshalled in the article "*Magnificat*" in the new edition of Herzog.

for other words which are spoken by the Mother of the Lord. Only two verses even in Luke i., so we are told by Professor Schmiedel (art. "Mary," in "Encycl. Biblica," iii.), contain the idea of the Virgin birth clearly and effectively, and in the same volume (art. "Nativity") we are informed by Professor Usener that to Hillmann belongs the merit (!) of having conclusively shown that the only verses in the third Gospel in which the supernatural birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary is stated are incompatible with the writer's representation of the rest of chaps. i. and ii.; these verses disturb the tradition: they are the fetters laid upon us by long habituation to a sacred tradition! What, then, is to be done with them? These two verses, Luke i. 34, 35, must be removed; they are interpolated by a redactor, they are an alien and irreconcilable trail into Luke's work, if it is to be regarded as an artistic unity! It is nothing to these writers that no substantial documentary evidence is or can be quoted in support of this arbitrary treatment of the text: * it is nothing to them that some of

* See further, pp. 94, 95.

their own section of advanced critics are not agreed as to whether even in these two verses something should not be retained; the doubt of Mary is psychologically incredible, and the angel's answer illogical, so even Harnack asks us to believe (see Moffatt's "Historical New Testament," xxxviii., second edition).

If this is not subjective criticism, is there any criticism which can more justly be called by that name?

One thing at this point may surely be said, that if the early Christians had wished to create "clearly and effectively" (so Schmiedel) the idea of the Virgin birth, they would not have put such a restraint upon their inventive powers as to confine themselves to two verses, the introduction of which is so confusing and ineffective in the critics' judgment. Such a restraint would have been "psychologically incredible" when we contrast it with the inventive flights of an Apocryphal Gospel like the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, with its repeated and lengthy references to the details of the Virgin birth. ✓

II.

IN the preceding paper attention was drawn to the proposal to omit vers. 34 and 35 from the first chapter of St. Luke without any serious documentary evidence, and thus to get rid of any statement of a supernatural birth. In the rest of the same chapter we are asked to see merely an account of the way in which the Evangelist places the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, because it was necessary that He should belong to the house of David and be born in David's city. Thither Joseph goes, accompanied by Mary his wife, for both Schmiedel and Usener, of course, accept as "the indubitably earlier reading" the statement of the Sinaitic Syriac palimpsest, "he, and Mary his wife being great with child, that there they might be enrolled" ("Encycl. Biblica," art. "Mary," 2955). But both writers are

entirely silent as to the possibility that even this reading might be quite compatible with a belief in our Lord's Virgin birth.

Mrs. Agnes Smith Lewis, to whom we owe the discovery of the palimpsest in 1892, has discussed this, and also the reading of the same codex in Matt. i. 15, 16, in the *Expository Times*, 1900, 1901. She fully allows that the word "wife" is more explicit than the expression used by the Greek MSS. or by the Peshitta, but she adds: "It shows clearly that Mary was under the full legal protection of Joseph." The force of this comment will be more fully seen when we turn to the same writer's remarks on Matt. i. 15, 16: "Unless our Lord had passed in common estimation for the son of Joseph, the latter could not have gratified his wish 'not to expose Mary,' v. 19." And so again: "Joseph was without doubt the foster-father of our Lord, and if any register of births was kept in the Temple or elsewhere, he would probably be there described as the actual father. Such he was from a social point of view, and it was, therefore, no wilful suppression of the truth when the most blessed

amongst women said to her Son: "Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." The illustrations which Mrs. Lewis adduces from Eastern social custom give additional value to her comments.

It is not surprising in this connection that Mrs. Lewis describes the genealogy of St. Matthew as a purely official one, and points out that only our Lord's social status is under consideration in it.*

* The reading in the Sinaitic palimpsest of Matt. i. 15, 16 is as follows: "Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph, to whom was betrothed Mary the Virgin, begat Jesus, who is called the Christ." One or two brief remarks may here be added. Even if it could be shown that the original genealogy ended with the words "Joseph begat Jesus" (as Schmiedel maintains), or if we hold that the Sinaitic Syriac in itself postulates such a clause, it would present no difficulty in view of the explanation given by Mrs. Lewis, with which we may compare Mr. Rackham's remarks in his exhaustive examination of the text before us in the Bishop of Worcester's "Dissertations," pp. 272-302. Moreover, the greater part, at all events, of the reading in the Sinaitic Syriac codex is much more easily explained as secondary than as original. It is much more easy, *e.g.* to suppose that the words "husband of Mary" would be altered into "to whom was betrothed" than the opposite,

It is, therefore, entirely beside the question to assert that the genealogies both of St. Matthew and of St. Luke are based upon the supposition that Joseph was the actual father of Jesus, as if no other explanation was within the bounds of possibility.

We may gain some satisfaction in turning

and a writer might desire to lay stress upon the virginity of Mary and the Virgin birth, and might alter and add to the text for this purpose. No words could be more emphatic as to the virginity of Mary, since the reading is not simply "a virgin," but "*the* Virgin," as the description of a person already well known; and in this case the scribe could allow the words "Joseph begat Jesus" to be retained without danger of any misunderstanding. These words described our Lord's relation to Joseph by the same phrase as that which described the relation of Joseph to his ancestors—a phrase implying, as is easily seen, not physical descent, but legal heirship; but still they might easily have been misunderstood if they were allowed to stand alone. Mr. Conybeare has recently maintained that the original form of Matt. i. 16 is to be found in the "Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila," but see in answer Mr. J. R. Wilkinson's acute criticism in the *Hibbert Journal*, January, 1903, pp. 354-359. Reference should also be made to the articles of Dr. Sanday, "Jesus Christ," and "Gospel of Matthew," Professor V. Bartlet in Dr. Hastings' "Bibl. Dict."; and W. H., "Select Readings," p. 140.

from such a dogmatic assertion to the words of an authority whose claims to speak on Jewish questions will scarcely be disputed: "A case such as that of Jesus," writes Dr. Dalman, "was, of course, not anticipated by the law; but if no other human fatherhood was alleged, then the child must have been regarded as bestowed by God upon the house of Joseph, for a betrothed woman, according to Israelitish law, already occupied the same status as a wife." In the light of this statement there is no difficulty in accepting the now generally prevailing opinion that both genealogies belong to Joseph, and neither of them to Mary. The Jewish view undoubtedly was that right of succession does not depend upon descent on the mother's side, and the recognition by her husband of the child supernaturally born to Mary conferred upon that child the legal rights of a son.*

* Dalman, "Die Worte Jesu," p. 263, E.T. p. 319. B. Weiss still maintains the Davidic descent of Mary; and see, to the same effect, Edersheim's "Jesus the Messiah," i. 149; also F. Delitzsch, "Messianische Weissagungen," p. 69, second edition, 1899. Dr. Charles, it may

But to proceed a little further. Schmiedel and Usener both admit that twice in the beginning of Luke's story Mary is spoken of as a virgin (*cf.* i. 27). How is it, then, they ask, that in Luke ii. 5 she is spoken of as Joseph's wife? This is the answer: "We are in a position to infer with certainty from Luke ii. 5 that in the original form of the narrative after i. 38 stood the further statement, hardly to be dispensed with (even though judged inadmissible by the redactor who interpolated i. 34, 35), that Mary was then taken to wife by Joseph, and that she conceived by him." Here we notice that another of the characteristic indubitable inferences is based upon the same reading of Luke ii. 5 to which attention has been drawn above, and upon a supposed interpolation which

be noted, has lately maintained ("Ascension of Isaiah," p. 75), that whilst the descent of Mary as well as of Joseph from David cannot be conclusively deduced from the New Testament, yet Mary's Davidic descent was a belief early established and accepted in the first half of the second century, and even earlier still. Dr. Dalman shows in a most interesting manner the trustworthiness of the Jewish tradition of the Davidic descent of Joseph.

"ought to come between Luke i. 38 and i. 39" ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Mary," 2960, and *cf.* art. "Nativity," 3350). This is the method of reasoning which Schmiedel and Usener pursue in justification of their paradoxical conclusion that Luke, so far from telling us anything of a supernatural birth, presupposes the very opposite. Their reference to such a passage as Luke ii. 48 in support of their position is quite beside the mark, as the verse is easily intelligible on the view already mentioned.

But if we are thus to rule out any reference to the supernatural birth from St. Luke's narrative by conjectural interpolations or omissions, where are we to look for the origin of the story? To St. Matthew. The redactor in Luke i. 34, 35 is really effecting a compromise with the legend as set forth by St. Matthew; in St. Matthew's narrative we have something entirely new—viz. that Jesus was conceived and born of a virgin; in chap. i. 18–25 this theory is set forth from first to last with full deliberation ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. arts. "Mary," 2960. "Nativity," 3350).

Now, hitherto we have been accustomed to regard the narrative in St. Matthew as Jewish Christian in its derivation, and to recognise that whilst St. Luke's account is written from the standpoint of Mary, St. Matthew's is written no less plainly from the standpoint of Joseph. It is not only that St. Matthew gives us the more public account as contrasted with the recital of the facts known only within the family, and gained, no doubt, from within the family circle or its intimate surroundings, but St. Matthew alone tells us that it was Joseph who proposed to put Mary away secretly; how an angel appeared unto Joseph in a dream; how Joseph arose from his sleep and obeyed the commands of the Lord; how, too, on two subsequent occasions an angel of the Lord again appears to Joseph in a dream, warning him to flee into Egypt with "the young child and his mother," and afterwards bidding him to return. But all this obvious setting of St. Matthew's narrative, and its dependence on information which presumably points to Joseph, as also the intensely Jewish background of St. Luke's early chapters,

is to go for nothing—"Paul being unacquainted with the doctrine of the Virgin birth, scholars long reckoned it to be Jewish Christian. That, however, was a mistake" (arts. "Mary," n.s., 2963). Nothing need be said for the moment as to this calm assumption of St. Paul's ignorance, but it is of interest to note at once that while in earlier days Keim was convinced that the belief in the Virgin birth had its rise on Jewish soil, the origin of this belief, according to Schmiedel and Usener, is to be sought in *Gentile* Christian circles. According to both of these writers, Isaiah vii. 14 could not possibly have given occasion for the shaping of the birth story, unless the doctrine of the Virgin birth had first commended itself on its own merits. The passage in the prophecy was only adduced as an after-thought in confirmation (arts. "Mary," 2963; "Nativity," 3351).


With regard to these statements one or two remarks may here be made. In the first place, it is exceedingly convenient for Schmiedel and Usener thus to take their stand upon the derivation of our Lord's Virgin birth from

Gentile sources. In this way they escape the insuperable difficulties which must always be encountered by those who would trace the belief in question to a Jewish origin. "Such a fable as the birth of the Messiah from a *virgin* could have arisen anywhere else easier than among the Jews," wrote the great historian Neander, himself a Jewish convert, and no subsequent criticism has deprived these words of their force. We may compare with them the remarks of B. Weiss in the latest edition of his "*Leben Jesu*," i. 210, in which he emphasizes the fact that, according to the view of Judaism, not the virgin condition, but that of marriage was regarded as a Divine institution, and the children of marriage as a blessing from God. ✓

But further: they thus escape the necessity of the hazardous attempt to find in the language of Philo a source for the belief in the Virgin birth of Jesus amongst Jewish Christians. The wives of the patriarchs, according to Philo, have intercourse with God; but the wives for the interpretation advocated by Philo are not women of flesh and blood, but in his allegorizing language ✓

virtues, which, conceiving from God—*i.e.* united with the knowledge of God—bring forth all moral perfection for them who are lovers of virtue—*viz.* the patriarchs. But such thoughts as these were not a product of Jewish soil at all, and Professor Usener, in commenting on this same passage in Philo's "De Cherub." 13, is careful to point out that the philosopher himself speaks of his doctrine as something quite new, and that we must look for its origin, not to the influence of Palestine, but to the Hellenistic atmosphere of Alexandria.

The same consideration—*viz.* the wide and impassable gulf which separates the definite statements of the Evangelists from the spiritualizing language of Philo—also discounts another attempt to trace the Virgin birth to Jewish sources. We are asked, *e.g.* by Beyschlag, to take such expressions as Gal. iv. 29—"he that was born after the spirit"—used of Isaac, and to see in them a first step towards assuming the generation without a human father of Him who, more than Isaac, was the Child of the promise. But the expression thus used of Isaac is found in close



juxtaposition with the assertion that both Isaac and Ishmael were equally sons of one father, Abraham—one by a bondmaid and one by a freewoman (*cf.* vers. 22 and 30)—so that both were, in one sense, born after the flesh. In the same manner, it is equally arbitrary to argue from the language used of John the Baptist (Luke i. 15) that it was but a short step for Jewish thought to advance from such statements to the promulgation of the theory of a Virgin birth.

But, without laying further stress upon these considerations, we may, from one point of view, derive no little satisfaction from the position taken up by Schmiedel and Usener. For it is quite evident, on the showing even of the most destructive critics, that we can no longer be referred to Isaiah vii. 14 as the origin of the “myth” of the Virgin birth. No Christian, of course, can be debarred from looking back upon the record of that birth, and finding in it a *fulfilment* of Isaiah’s prophecy. But this Christian interpretation must always be kept distinct from the current Jewish interpretation


of the prophet's words. In this connection the verdict of Dalman will carry weight: "No trace," he writes, "is to be found among the Jews of any Messianic application of Isaiah's words concerning the Virgin's Son from which, by any possibility—as some have maintained—the whole account of the miraculous birth of Jesus could have derived its origin" ("Die Worte Jesu," 226, E.T. 276).

But our satisfaction ceases when we further read concerning the Virgin birth, as recorded by St. Matthew, that "here we unquestionably enter the circle of pagan ideas" ("Nativity," 3350). Let us suppose, then, that the story does come to us from *Gentile* Christian sources. If this is so, we must at the same time remember that the only ground which St. Matthew—or, at all events, the Gospel which bears his name—adduces for introducing the story is the fulfilment of a *Jewish* prophecy—a prophecy which is applied in such a manner as to be totally at variance with the application hitherto given to it by the Jews themselves. In making this application, the writer runs counter, not only to

Jewish feeling in the days of Jesus, but long after His time. Thus, in Justin Martyr's "Dialogue with Trypho the Jew," the Jew says: "We all expect the Christ to be a man of men." ✓ Nothing is said or intimated of a supernatural birth. Moreover, in Luke's narrative, which is much more full than that of St. Matthew, and comes to us admittedly from Jewish Christian sources, it will be remembered that no reference whatever is made to Isaiah's words. How are we to account for the amazing boldness of the writer, or editor of St. Matthew's Gospel, in thus introducing a prophecy of uncertain meaning in Jewish circles into the midst of a story with an unmistakably Jewish background, to support ✓ an element unmistakably un-Jewish—viz. the Virgin birth—unless upon the supposition that he felt sure of his ground, and that Isaiah's prophecy had received the fulfilment which he claimed for it?

But the prophecy, we are told, is merely an after-thought, and would not have been introduced unless the doctrine of the birth from a Virgin had already received confirmation.

Before, however, we admit the validity of this confirmation, we may be pardoned for venturing to ask a previous question. "Here we enter the circle of pagan ideas": the whole sentence assumes that an entrance has been effected before even the possibility of an open door has been seriously considered. Is it a likely supposition that the Christian Church or its representatives would make an incursion into the circle of pagan ideas to derive therefrom the story of the birth of their Holy Redeemer from sin? No doubt it may be urged that the mythological conception of sons of the gods and of heroes might seem to afford an analogy which would tend to enhance the greatness of the origin of Jesus in Gentile circles, but Dr. Weiss expresses the verdict of the Christian consciousness of to-day, no less than of that of the early Church, when he repeats with no hesitation his earlier words: "The shameless glorifying of sensual desire in these myths could only provoke in the primitive Christian consciousness the deepest abhorrence; every endeavour to refer any such idea to Jesus must have appeared a profanation of what was



most holy, by thus dragging it through the mire of sensuality" ("Leben Jesu," i. 211, 4th edit.).* Fortunately, we can pass beyond even the most probable conjectures, and lay our hands upon statements in more than one early document which give us positive proof of this deep abhorrence. The earliest Christian "Apology" which we possess—that of the philosopher Aristides (126–140 A.D.)—plainly accepts the Virgin birth, and places it amongst the primary and established facts of the Christian creed. It may, no doubt, be urged that careful attention should be given to the different versions and the Greek text of the "Apology," but it would seem that, making all allowances for this consideration, we are quite justified in regarding the words "being born of a virgin, He (the Lord Jesus Christ) assumed flesh," as the actual words of Aristides himself; and it is evident from the context that this fact is placed upon a level with the facts of the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, and Ascension. ✓

* For an interesting parallel in Dr. W. H. Mill's well known "Mythical Interpretation of the Gospels," see "Witness of the Epistles," p. 289.

It must, therefore, have been a fact which had been previously both known and established, as otherwise it would scarcely have found a place in a writing which took the nature of an "Apologia."

But the point with which we are more immediately concerned is that this same "Apology" which thus asserts most unequivocally the Virgin birth also emphasizes, and describes at length, the horror and disgust which inspired the Christians as they recalled the heathen legends of the doings of gods and goddesses. This is abundantly evident whether we have recourse to the Syriac or to the Greek. Thus, in the Syriac, chap. ix., we read, "By reason of these tales, O king, much evil has arisen among men, who to this day are imitators of their gods, and practise adultery and defile themselves . . . for if he who is said to be the chief and king of their gods does these things, how much more shall his worshippers imitate him?" and with these remarks we may compare similar utterances in chap. xi. of the Greek. A few years later we pass to the writings of Justin

Martyr, and we note not only his frequent references to the Virgin birth, but also that, like Aristides, he regards that fact as occupying the same position in the Christian summary of belief as the other great facts relating to our Lord, and that, like Aristides, he speaks in a manner which shows the condemnation pronounced upon the coarseness of Greek mythology by representatives of the Early Church. An American writer who has lately examined at great length the testimony of the ante-Nicene writers to the Virgin birth, emphasizes Justin's repudiation of the Greek mythological explanation of this doctrine; and "whether," he adds, "the Christian conception be right or not, Justin has, in so far as he represents the early second-century thought, freed it from the grossness of similar heathen stories, and has preserved in his own more explicit language much of the chaste quality of the Gospel narratives themselves."* Certainly ✓

* "The Virgin Birth," *American Journal of Theology*, July, 1902. The same writer points out the important fact that if Justin was in possession of some extra-canonical material, as, e.g. in his mention of the birth of Jesus in

it may be urged that there are other passages in Justin in which he refers to Greek mythological stories as furnishing a kind of parallel to the Christian acceptance of the Virgin birth, or in which he maintains that these pagan stories had been invented by the demons to imitate the truth or to detract from its significance. Schmiedel has strongly insisted upon these passages and ideas (art. "Mary," 2964), but he has no comment whatever to make upon those other passages in which Justin differentiates the Christian belief from the gross fables of the Greeks. Moreover, it must be remembered that in all their references to pagan myths the Christian apologists started with a belief in the Virgin birth as an acknowledged fact, so that such references cannot account for the origin of that belief, although they may have been used to support deductions from it.

It is, of course, still asserted that similar

a cave near Bethlehem, yet that he was evidently very little influenced by any such source of information, and that it supplanted or coloured in a very small degree his reflection of the canonical infancy stories.

stories of a miraculous birth have gathered round the name of a Plato or an Augustus. With regard to the former, there is no evidence that any such story of the birth of Plato was known in the days of Speusippus, Plato's nephew; * and even if Plato's mother is regarded in any of the accounts as a virgin, yet the authorities are so conflicting that it would be most precarious to build upon their statements. Diogenes Laertius, in his account of the life of Plato, mingles together history and legend, truth and fiction, in a wholesale manner, and the origin of the birth story in this case is most probably to be sought for in the eagerness with which in the Grecian world similar stories gathered around great and illustrious names.

The supposed parallel in the case of Augustus has again been recently emphasized in a pamphlet ("Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu Christi") published last year by Professor Soltan, whose name has been frequently referred to of late in

* Whereas there is reasonable ground for believing that the information of the Evangelists came to them from the members and friends of our Lord's family circle.

connection with our Gospels and their contents. According to him, it is possible that the message of salvation in Luke ii. 14 was first derived from the words of some inscriptions in honour of Augustus, and that then the further step was easily made to transfer the belief in the supernatural birth of the Emperor to the case of Jesus. It really seems as if no absurdities are too great to be pressed into the service of the deniers of the facts relating to our Lord's birth. In the inscriptions to which Soltau refers it is quite true that reference is made to the Emperor as a saviour, that the day of his birth is described as a day of glad tidings for the world, that peace is spoken of as a prevailing blessing, and that the Emperor's benevolence and benefactions are duly celebrated. But it is not too much to say that every one of the words so much emphasized by Soltau may be paralleled from the Old Testament and the Apocryphal books. The word "Saviour," for example, finds a place, and a very frequent place, in passages which may be cited from these two sources ; the expression "to bring glad tidings" is found again and again in

the Old Testament, and sometimes in close connection with the thought of the salvation of God ; and, to say nothing of the fact that if we adopt, in Luke ii. 14, the R.V. rendering, Soltau's parallel is apparently destroyed, the thought of goodwill towards men, expressed by the same Greek word as in the angels' hymn, finds a place in the Old Testament, as, for example, in Ps. cv. 4 (*cf.* Ps. v. 12 ; l. 18). But Soltau apparently has nothing to say to the Jewish phraseology in the first clause of the same angelic hymn : "Glory to God in the highest." If any one desires to see an account of the fantastic dreams and portents which were associated with the birth of Augustus, he could not do better than consult the extracts given at so much length in the closing pages of Soltau's pamphlet. In addition to all this, it must never be forgotten that no parallel of any weight can really be instituted between the Gospel narrative and the story of the birth of Augustus, because in the latter case no birth of a *virgin* is in question.

III.

AN endeavour was made in the last paper to show the impossibility of deriving the doctrine of our Lord's Virgin birth from current pagan ideas. Before we pass to another aspect of our subject it may be well to refer to the supposed influence of the Buddhist legend upon the Christian narratives of the Incarnation. "Amongst Gentile influences," writes Professor Schmiedel ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Mary," 2962), "those of Buddhism must also be taken into account as possible"; and the same writer in another place ("Gospels," 124) gives a list of the parallels which Seydel has drawn between the story of the childhood of Jesus and the life of Buddha. So, too, Pfeiderer, in the new edition of his "Urchristentum" (i. 411), dwells at length upon the same parallels, although he

considers that no direct influence of Buddhism upon Christianity can be proved, but that the likeness in the incidents of the birth of Jesus and the Buddha owes its origin to a common source of popular Eastern folk-lore. But, in the first place, we may well hesitate to defer to Professor Seydel as an ultimate authority, for no writer has shown a stronger bias, or has more extravagantly elaborated the alleged parallels between our Gospels and the Buddhist sources. It would be easy to find acknowledged proofs of this extravagance in learned German critics, and one of them, whose name is well-known in England, has entered a strong and very satirical protest against Seydel's method of procedure in laying stress upon instances of a perfectly general character as supposed dependencies of the Gospels on Buddhist books.*

* See *Theologische Rundschau*, February, 1899. The editor, Dr. Bousset, takes Seydel to task for these comparisons, or rather dependencies, and points out by a modern illustration how ridiculous it is to suppose that the blessing pronounced upon the parents of the Buddha involves any dependence upon such words as those of Luke xi. 29.

But the point with which we are more immediately concerned is this. Seydel, and Schmiedel and Pfeiderer with him, refer to the virgin birth of the Buddha as if it was an undoubted part of the Buddhist story. But, to say the least, this may be seriously questioned. So far as earlier pre-Christian writings are concerned, we find no mention in some of them either of mother or of birth. And when we pass to post-Christian sources, a popular biography, or the part of a biography like the "Lalita Vistara," while it gives us a lengthy account of the Buddha's birth, makes no affirmation of the virginity of his mother, although it does say that she had never brought forth children, and that her husband had agreed to her wish to live in ascetic chastity for thirty-two months.* In a later biography, the "Abhinishkramana Sutra," the Chinese version emphasizes not only the fact that Queen Maya was married, but that she had lived with her

* See the article of the Sanskrit scholar, the late Professor E. B. Cowell, in "Dictionary of Christian Biography," art. "Buddha," i., p. 343, and Kellogg's "The Light of Asia and the Light of the World," p. 112.

husband as his wife. These statements, which might easily be multiplied, so far from affirming, actually preclude the belief in the virgin birth of the Buddha. Moreover, it is not too much to say that the statement of the scholar Cooma Korösi, which is so often quoted in support of the virginity, not only relates to Mongolian Buddhism, which has a growth of scarcely 400 years, but that in itself it affords no substantial evidence.* Professor Rhys Davids writes of it as follows: "Cooma Korösi refers in a distant way to a belief of the later Mongol Buddhists that Maya was a virgin (*As. Res.*, xx. 299); but this has not been confirmed."

But even if more could be alleged for the virginity of the mother as a factor in the Buddhist birth stories, we should still have to account for the absurdity and grotesqueness which mark these stories, when they are placed side by side with the simplicity and reserve of the Gospels.

* See a letter in the *Guardian*, December 3, 1902, by the Rev. Graham Sandberg, who has made a special study for many years of all forms of the Buddhist faith, which will repay perusal on this and other kindred points.

✓ Dr. Rhys Davids frankly admits that the idea that a man should enter his mother's womb in the form of a (six-tusked) white elephant seems a most grotesque folly, although he claims to have discovered the origin of the belief in the older sun-worship; the white elephant, like the white horse, being an emblem of the sky ("Buddhism," p. 184). But the contrast to the Gospels is not only to be found in this one marked particular, it pervades the whole story; at the conception of the Buddha the ten thousand worlds are filled with light, the child before he is born preaches to the angels who guard him; at his birth he takes seven steps forwards, and exclaims with a lion's voice, "I am the chief of the world; this is my last birth." The last words of the infant Buddha remind us of another contrast to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. The Buddha had already been born, as he himself taught, again and again; he had come into the world in his efforts to fulfil all the great Perfections time after time, alike in forms of honour and also of humiliation; thus, eighty-three times he had been an ascetic, twenty-four

times a Brahman, forty-three times a sun-god, five times a slave, twice a rat, and twice a pig. Such considerations as these may further serve to illustrate the recent remarks of Dr. Fairbairn, in speaking of our Lord's supernatural Person as presented to us in the Gospels: "The marvellous thing is not that we have two birth stories, but that we have *only two*." ("Philosophy of the Christian Religion," p. 349). ✓

But it would seem that any discussion of the question of the Virgin birth of our Lord has now to consider the religion of Egypt, no less than that of Buddhism. Professor Sayce has recently reminded us of the belief in the virgin-birth of the god Pharaoh, which carries us back at least to the time of the Eighteenth Dynasty. From the inscriptions we learn that he had no human father, and that his mother was still a virgin, when the god of Thebes "incarnated himself," so that she might "behold him in his divine form." Two comments may here be made. In the first place, such statements, whatever else they may be, are a further evidence of what may be called "the craving of the human consciousness ✓

for the intervention of the supernatural," when men are seeking how to describe the origin of lives which they have held to be of more than superhuman greatness. The evidence of this craving was abundant in Egypt. The birth of each king would seem to have been regarded as a special act of the gods; the gods said on the day of his birth, "we have begotten him;" the goddesses said, "he went forth from us." But if it is sought to institute any parallel between the virgin birth described in the inscriptions and scenes from the temple of Luxor in Egypt and the narratives of the Gospels, it must not be forgotten that in the former we have at least some elements of that glorifying of sensual desire which is so far removed from the chaste restraint and simplicity of the Evangelists, and which, as we have seen, was so unlikely to commend itself in the least degree to the consciousness of the early Church. Professor Sayce's own translation on the same page of his work gives us quite sufficient justification for this statement.*

* Said by Amon-Ra, etc.: "He (the god) has incarnated

But the remark of Dr. Fairbairn, to which reference has been made, reminds us of the stress laid upon the silence of the other Evangelists, St. Mark and St. John, as to our Lord's Virgin birth. And in each case silence has been interpreted as nescience. But so far as St. Mark is concerned, the earliest Gospel avowedly adopts as its starting-point the starting-point of Apostolic testimony, and if St. Peter, as there is very good reason to believe, was the main source of St. Mark's pages, there is a striking coincidence between the Evangelist's opening narrative of John's baptism, and St. Peter's words in Acts i. 21, where he defines the witness of the twelve as "beginning from the baptism of John." ✓
This silence of St. Mark is supposed to be

himself in the royal person of this husband (Thotmes IV., etc.); he found her lying in her beauty; he stood beside her as a god; she has fed upon sweet odours emanating from his majesty; he has gone to her that he may be a father through her; he caused her to behold him in his divine form when he had gone upon her that she might bear a child at the sight of his beauty; his loveliness penetrated her flesh, filling it with the odour of all his perfumes of Punt."—"Religions of Ancient Egypt and Babylonia," p. 249, 1902. ✓

emphasized by reminding us that he was not only the interpreter of Peter, but that he lived some time in the company of Barnabas and Paul. But Luke was also some time in the company of Paul, and Mark with him. At the period when the two Evangelists were thus together in Rome, it may fairly be presumed that St. Luke had already collected in Palestine the main materials for his tracing the course of all things accurately from the first. But if this is a fair inference, it becomes difficult to believe that St. Mark was altogether ignorant of the incidents of the Lord's birth which St. Luke narrates so fully, whilst at the same time his silence may be interpreted by the plan of his Gospel. The Apostolic testimony, on the lines of which St. Mark plainly followed, was, above all, as the Acts of the Apostles enables us to see—i. 22, x. 37, xiii. 24, 31—an appeal to our Lord's public ministry, to facts which were open to the scrutiny of the Jews in Jerusalem and elsewhere, facts of which the Twelve claimed to be witnesses. Moreover, the Apostles were preachers and missionaries, no less than witnesses; they had a message to

deliver, and the message which the Twelve and St. Paul with them placed in the forefront of their teaching was the message of Jesus Himself, as it had been of the Baptist before Him—repentance and the forgiveness of sins (Mark i. 4, 14; Acts ii. 38, v. 11, xiii. 38). It would seem, therefore, that there need be no difficulty in allowing that a narrative of what preceded the baptism of John did not regularly belong to the elements of the first missionary preaching. And St. Mark himself had been fully acquainted with missionary methods; he had known, too, how vividly St. Peter had represented the life of Jesus and His official ministry as characterized by action, energy, and power (Acts ii. 22, x. 38); and as St. Peter notes the public appearance of Jesus as the commencement of the Messianic work of salvation, so, too, St. Mark commences his Gospel with the Messianic messenger and his announcement of the coming Christ. ✓

If we turn to the Gospel of St. John, we must remember that that Gospel makes a special claim to be, before all things, a Gospel of personal

testimony, and that we have, therefore, no right to expect in its pages details which are not involved in that claim. But it does not follow that the silence of St. John is correctly interpreted as equivalent to his ignorance of the mystery of our Lord's birth. When—*e.g.*, in vii. 21, 22—he recites the words of the multitude : “What! doth the Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?” there is no reason for supposing from this quotation of the question of the ignorant multitude that St. John was himself unaware of the Lord's birth at Bethlehem. The writer of this Gospel, if he was St. John, could hardly have been ignorant of such a fact, and in any case, even if we suppose for a moment that St. John was not the writer, his narrative is quite consistent with the supposition that the birth at Bethlehem was not denied, but rather presupposed. In connection with this interpretation of the passage, it is of interest to quote the closing words of Professor Bacon's note in his “Genealogy of

Jesus Christ" (Dr. Hastings' "Bibl. Dict.," ii. 138): "The *author*," he writes, "presupposes the birth in Bethlehem."

Professor Schmiedel, indeed ("Encycl. Biblica," art. "Mary," 2959), seems to think that Jesus should not have allowed the multitude to continue in their mistake, if there was a mistake. But we may reasonably ask, if He had told them the truth, would they have believed Him? They had certainly not shown any marked disposition to do so, and if He had revealed to them the secret of His birth, such a disclosure would only have anticipated in a more painful form the mockery and calumny of a later date. Professor Usener ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Nativity," 3347) fastens upon this passage in St. John, because, in his opinion, "it reveals the hidden path by which Bethlehem found its way into the Gospel tradition," and he evidently also thinks that the Davidic descent attributed to Jesus may be traced to the belief expressed in this same passage of St. John, that the Messiah was to be descended from David. But we have already pointed out that whilst prophecy undoubtedly

pointed to the birth of the Messiah at Bethlehem, it is most improbable that the circumstances which brought about a fulfilment of that prophecy in the case of Jesus could have been invented. And so far as the Davidic descent is concerned, we may not only refer to its remarkable defence by Dalman ("Die Worte Jesu," 263, E.T. p. 320), but to the acknowledgment of Professor Bacon ("Genealogy," Hastings' "Bibl. Dict."), that if critical science has shown the futility of harmonistic theories of our Lord's pedigree, it has more than compensated for it by establishing with equal certainty the acceptance of the fact of the Davidic descent of Jesus by Himself, His contemporaries, and His immediate followers, and that Messianic pretensions absolutely devoid of evidence of Davidic descent could not have passed unchallenged as those of Jesus seem to have done.*

* It is noteworthy, although of course too much stress should not be laid upon it, that in Germany, not only Dr. Resch, but Dr. Blass and Dr. Zahn, have recently declared themselves in favour of the remarkable and early attested reading in John i. 13, where, after he had spoken of believing "in the name of Jesus Christ," the evangelist

Moreover, without pressing the fact that the narratives of the Synoptists would have been current long before the publication of St. John's Gospel, according to all reasonable probability, there is a further consideration of no little importance. Supposing for a moment that Dr. Harnack is correct, and that the fourth Gospel comes to us from the presbyter John. This personage, in Harnack's view, had lived for a long time in Ephesus, and had received traditions from the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. The Gospel which he then edited could not have been later, according to Harnack, than 110 A.D. But this brings us within a few years of the martyrdom of St. Ignatius, and no one has emphasized more strongly than he the Virgin birth of our Lord, or placed it more prominently, as we shall see, in the forefront of the Church's Creed. Can we, then, suppose that what was

proceeds, "Who was born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh," etc. See Blass, "Philology of the Gospels," p. 234, and Findlay, *Expositor*, February, 1899, where he points out that the phrase in 1 John v. 18, R.V., is a remarkable parallel, as applied to our Lord, to the phrase, in the reading above, of John i. 13, "who was born of God."

known to St. Ignatius, and was specially insisted upon by him in writing to the *Ephesians*, was unknown to the writer in whom Harnack sees the chief ruler of the Church in Asia? ("Chronologie," i. 677 *et seq.*).

/ One more important "silence" remains to be considered, that of St. Paul. In the first place we must remember that St. Paul is not writing a Life of Jesus, but a series of letters to various Churches, in which a large amount of teaching is evidently presupposed. It was scarcely to be expected that in a letter the Apostle would accentuate the details of the Virgin birth, but it may be fairly maintained that he makes statements which are quite consistent with, if not dependent upon, a belief in that fact. Moreover, it is strange that critics, who are never tired of telling us that St. Paul's thoughts moved around two facts and two only—the death and resurrection of Jesus—should express surprise at his apparent ignorance of the miraculous birth, which in their own showing did not form the centre of his Gospel of salvation. It must, of course, not be forgotten that there may be allusions in

St. Paul's Epistles to the fact under consideration. The most important passage in this connection is Gal. iv. 4, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman," etc. The expression, "made of a woman," is sufficiently striking to have caused even Hilgenfeld and Steck to note that it is in excellent accordance with the generation of Jesus without a human father, although not expressly attesting that fact. Amongst more recent writers it is noteworthy that Dr. Zahn asks the following question: "Why does Paul here only mention the mother, since it is evident that it was much more decisive for the subjection of Jesus to the Mosaic law, to which the context refers, that He should have been born and have grown up as the Son of an Israelitish man?" And his answer is this: "Plainly, because in the thought of Paul there was no room for Joseph as the father of Jesus beside His heavenly Father" ("Das Apostolische Symbolum," p. 64).

But whilst Dr. Zahn's interpretation of the words before us shows us that they are not to be lightly dismissed in their relation to the present subject, there is no occasion to press this verse

Son of God by the Divine will and power, truly born of a Virgin," and with this we may compare his language in writing to the Ephesians (xviii. 2) and to the Trallians (ix. 1) (*cf.* Swete, "Apostles' Creed," p. 55).*

But quite apart from these and other verses, there are portions of St. Paul's teaching in which the supernatural conception may well have formed the background of his thought. For whilst his Epistles are in entire agreement with the teaching of St. Peter and of other New Testament writers, in referring to our Lord as of the seed of David, and to His human lineage as derived from the Jewish fathers, they also consider Him from another point of view peculiar to the writer. St. Paul represents our Lord as the second Adam, as the pure and sinless Head of humanity in

* Schmiedel further quotes Rom. viii. 3, and affirms that it contains an impossible statement, the Virgin birth being held. But it cannot fairly be said that either the Greek or the argument represents the flesh of Christ as *sinful flesh*, and it has been well said that the flesh of Christ is "like" ours, inasmuch as it is flesh; "like," and only "like," because it is not sinful (Sanday and Headlam, "Romans," p. 193, and Gifford, "Romans," *in loc.*).

✓ contrast to the first Adam, through whose transgression a sinful taint had been inherited by every member of his race. No one will dispute that St. Paul is the writer who emphasizes most strongly the propagation of sinfulness from Adam down, while at the same time he also insists most strongly that Jesus was without sin in the flesh in which sin before had reigned. But such a conception certainly seems to make a new creative act of God, a cancelling of the natural continuity, an almost indispensable consequence in St. Paul's theology.* No words could describe this consequence better than those of Neander, "Life of Jesus," p. 17, E.T., but in more recent days the same point of view has been emphasized by Lechler, Schmid, B. Weiss in Germany. If through the sin of one man all sinned, all knew sin, with the exception of Him who knew no

* In this connection Bishop Westcott's remarks ("Life," ii. p. 308) will be read with interest, in which, as against those who deny the Virgin birth, he emphasises the fact that our Lord was not "a man, one man in the race," but "the new man, the Son of man in whom the race is gathered up."

sin (2 Cor. v. 21), surely some factor must have been present in the birth of this One Being which differentiated it from the birth of any other son of man. And if we ask, What was that factor? is it unnatural to turn for an answer to the Gospel of St. Paul's companion and friend, and to his account of the birth of Him, who was for the Evangelist, as for St. Paul, the second Adam? Or, are we to suppose that what was so fully known to St. Luke was entirely unknown to St. Paul? It is full of significance, in this connection, that whilst St. Luke is the Evangelist who describes the human nature of Jesus as due to a new creative act of God (Luke i. 35), he is also the Evangelist who describes the first man as "the son of God" (Luke iii. 38), in virtue also of a new creative act.* There was thus a parallel in St. Luke's mind, as in that of St. Paul, between the first and second Adam. But there was also a contrast; the second Adam was the restorer of life and the renewer of sonship, the Saviour, in whose name remission of sins should

* See further Dr. Orr, "The Miraculous Conception and Modern Thought," in "Ritschlianism," p. 232, 1903.

be preached ; and that contrast, although more definitely expressed in the letters of St. Paul, is most surely implied in the language and representation of St. Luke.

But it must not be forgotten that there may have been special reasons why the Virgin birth was not made publicly known at an earlier date than the New Testament records enable us to affirm. It is, of course, easy for Schmiedel to sneer at what apologists have called the "family secret," a secret which in his judgment had no existence.* But such a judgment entirely overlooks what Dr. Weiss again emphasizes in his new edition, "Leben Jesu," i. 209—viz. the high and holy interest which the family of Jesus had in keeping this secret of the house. "If there was never a doubt," says Dr. Weiss, "among the people that Jesus was the actual son of the man in whose house He grew up, if the reproach of illegitimate birth is not employed by the

* Schmiedel insists upon such passages as Mark iii. 21 and the unbelief of our Lord's brethren, but see in answer Edersheim's "Jesus the Messiah," i. 543, and Weiss, *u.s.*, p. 207.

enemies of Jesus till a much later date, and *is obviously based upon our Gospel narratives*, this is an evident proof that the honour of the house was not exposed by affording a pretext for each unbeliever to designate Jesus as one born in sin and shame." * And in this consideration he finds an ample reason for the comparatively late dissemination of the facts concerning the Virgin birth. ✓

* All this aspect of the question is entirely ignored in such a painful book as that published only last year, entitled "Das Leben Jesu nach Jüdischen Quellen," by Dr. Samuel Krauss ; see *e.g.* p. 214.

IV.

BUT even if we suppose that our Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke in their canonical form are to be placed, as Schmiedel would place them, in the first or second decade of the second century, there is evidence that the belief in the Virgin birth must have already gained wide currency. Reference has already been made to the remarkable testimony of St. Ignatius. If we may reasonably place his martyrdom about 110 A.D., and if we remember that he had been the Bishop of the great Church of Antioch, and that on his way to his death he addresses various Churches of Asia and the Church in Rome itself, that he writes a letter to St. Polycarp, in which he explains that he had been suddenly prevented from writing to all the Churches, we shall better

understand with what extent of knowledge and authority he could write such words as these: "And the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing were hidden from the notice of the princes of this world, and likewise also the death of the Lord—those mysteries to be cried aloud—the which were wrought in the silence of God" ("Ephesians," xix.). So, again, in addressing the Smyrnæans, he gives glory that they are fully persuaded as touching our Lord that He is truly born of a Virgin, and truly nailed up in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod ("Smyrnæans," i.). If such words mean anything at all, they surely indicate that St. Ignatius was aware that he was not asserting the Virgin birth as if it was something novel, alluded to for the first time. It formed part of the message which was to be cried aloud; it was placed on a level with the undoubted historical fact of the crucifixion of the Lord.

Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that St. Ignatius evidently has in mind the Docetic heresy. We can see this from his repetition of the word "truly"—"truly born," "truly

crucified." It would have been comparatively easy, as Dr. Swete so well puts it, for St. Ignatius to have turned the Docetic position, if he could have replied that our Lord was born, not in a different way, but exactly as other men are born. But it is evident that no such reply was given, and that, on the contrary, the Virgin birth was strenuously asserted as part of the deposit of all the Churches. Of course, men like the Docetæ, who did not scruple to explain away the Passion, would not hesitate to explain away the miraculous conception; but it has been carefully noted that, with all their explanations, they do not appear from the evidence before us to have denied the fact. Before proceeding further, we may here pause to notice one or two points connected with this early testimony. In his recent edition of the "Ascension of Isaiah," Dr. Charles would refer the remarkable passage (xi. 2-22) to a very early date, deriving it from the archetype which he carries back to the close of the first century (Introduction, pp. xxii.-xlv.). The Mother of the Lord is spoken of as Mary, a virgin, espoused to a man named Joseph, a carpenter, who was

also of the seed of David : " And when she was espoused she was found with child, and Joseph the carpenter was desirous to put her away." The narrative is then continued for several verses, until in xi. 16 we read : "[This] hath escaped all the heavens and all the princes and all the gods of this world." On this passage Dr. Charles comments as follows, and the significance of his words in relation to the testimony of St. Ignatius will be seen at once : " What escaped the princes ✓ of this world is the virginity and the child-bearing of Mary. This being so, it is hard to avoid concluding that our text is the source of Ignatius" (" Ephesians," xix., see the passage cited above, where the commencing words are the same as in the passage before us). It would seem, therefore, that if Dr. Charles is correct, the passage in the " Ascension of Isaiah " is earlier than the letters of St. Ignatius. But however this may be, these letters in themselves carry us back, as we have seen, to a very early date ; and the virginity of Mary in the Ephesian Epistle of Ignatius ✓ obviously forms part, as Dr. Charles remarks, of a received doctrine. In this connection, moreover,

✓ we may at least refer to the statement of the learned German Kattenbusch, that the oldest Roman formula dates about 100 A.D.* In this formula we read of "our Lord, who was born of the Holy Spirit and Mary the Virgin." In this verdict of Kattenbusch we have, not only the statement of a German scholar who has made the Apostles' Creed and its history his special study, but also a statement which assigns the oldest Roman formula to a far earlier date than that to which it is often referred by a large circle of his countrymen, in their pursuit of similar studies.

Reference has already been made to the remarkable testimony of Aristides,† in which we find the Virgin birth placed side by side as equally an

* See Schmiedel, "Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Ministry," 3122.

✓ † "Everything that we know of the dogmatics of the second century agrees with the belief that at that period the virginity of Mary was a part of the formulated Christian belief. Nor need we hesitate, in view of the antiquity of the Panthera fable, to give the doctrine a place in the creed of Aristides."—J. Armitage Robinson, D.D., "Texts and Studies," I., i., p. 25.

historical fact with the death, the burial, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The testimony of Justin Martyr to the fact under consideration is equally emphatic, while he differentiates in the strongest terms the Christian belief from the stories told of the god Jupiter ("Apology," i. 33). We have thus in St. Ignatius, Aristides, and Justin the combined testimony of the Churches of Asia, Syria, Palestine, Greece—a testimony both early and widespread. Moreover, this testimony may be strengthened from other quarters, and that, too, in an unexpected manner. Thus, in the Gospel of Peter, which we can hardly place later than the end of the first quarter of the second century (Dr. Sanday, "Inspiration," p. 310), there is, according to Origen ("Com. Matt.," x. 17), a statement that the "brethren" of Jesus were sons of Joseph by a former wife; "now they who say so," adds Origen, "wish to preserve the honour of Mary in virginity to the end." But if it is quite unlikely that any such deduction would be drawn by the heretical circles in which this Gospel of Peter originated, we can only conclude that the deduction had been ✓

previously drawn, and that because the belief in the Virgin birth was so early and so firmly established.*


Much stress has been laid upon the fact that the Ebionites of the second century denied the Virgin birth. But we must remember that the name "Ebionites" does not meet us at all before the time of St. Irenæus; and that Origen in two places ("Contra Celsum," v. 61, and "Com. Matt.," xvi. 12) refers to two kinds of Ebionites, one of which acknowledged that Jesus was born of a Virgin, while the other did not accept this belief. No doubt there are statements in Justin Martyr which plainly show that a certain number of Christians in his day held with this latter kind

* *Church Quarterly Review*, vol. xxxv., pp. 480, 481; see also Bishop of Worcester, "Dissertations," p. 48, and Pullan, "History of Early Christianity," p. 207. No reference is here made to the "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," because of the uncertainty of the date. Dr. Charles maintains in Hastings' "Bibl. Dict.," iv., that what he regards as Christian interpolations, including a plain reference to the Virgin birth, may be dated from the middle of the second century onwards, whilst Bousset places them between 150-200 A.D., and regards them as coming from one hand.

of Ebionite, referred to by Origen.* But the context in which Justin places his statements enables us to see, not only that Jewish Christians would have had a special difficulty with regard to the acceptance of the Lord's Virgin birth, since the Jews believed that the Messiah was to be born "a man of men" (as Justin points out in his "Dialogue with Trypho"), but that Justin himself is stating the belief of a minority in the Church—a belief which he for his own part strongly repudiates: "For there are some, I

* In his "History of Early Christianity," p. 207 *et seq.*, Mr. Pullan has fully discussed Dr. Hort's statement that the Ebionites and Nazarenes were only one sect ("Judaistic Christianity," p. 197, and to the same effect Dr. Bright, "Some Aspects of Primitive Church Life," p. 259). But if we prefer Dr. Hort's account, and see in the name Nazarene a description of the Jewish Christians of Syria, either taken or inherited from the designation of the Apostolic Age, it does not follow that we should regard these people as representing the full Catholic tradition about our Lord's birth and person. Epiphanius in his day is very hesitating in his language, and apparently cannot say whether they denied the Virgin birth or not, whilst in their Christology there is also considerable uncertainty, although they appear to have held what may be fairly called "the somewhat-shrunken orthodoxy" of the *Didache*.

said, of our number who admit that He is Christ, while holding Him to be a man of men, with
✓ whom I do not agree ; nor would I, even though most of those who have the same opinions as myself should say so, since we were enjoined by Christ Himself to put no faith in human doctrines, but those proclaimed by the blessed prophets and taught by Himself" ("Dial. cum Tryphone," 48). Professor Schmiedel ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Mary," 2963) bids us remember that we do not hear of the Ebionites as a "sect" before the end of the second century ; and he quotes the above passage in Justin, or, rather, a few words of it, in proof that the Ebionites represented the continuation of one of the earliest tendencies of Christianity. But that tendency was predominantly a Jewish tendency, as Irenæus, in his description of the Ebionites, abundantly testifies ("Against Heresies," i. 26, 2) ; and that such a tendency might easily be associated with a difficulty in accepting the Virgin birth we have already seen. We do not, however, find that Dr. Schmiedel quotes the strong condemnation which Justin Martyr passes, nor does he mention



that the Church-writers mentioned above show that the belief in the Virgin birth was not only of early date, but of wide acceptance—an acceptance shared amongst others by the Churches of Syria and Palestine. And whatever may have been their origin, Justin Martyr's "some of our number" certainly did not represent the belief of the Catholic Church.

The mention of St. Irenæus reminds us how his writings supply us with a further remarkable proof of the position which must have been assigned to the belief in the Virgin birth, long before the close of the second century and in Churches far and wide.* In the opening of his great work ("Against Heresies," i. 10) he speaks of the faith which the Church had received from the Apostles and their disciples: in one God, the Father Almighty; in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Ghost, Who by the prophets declared the birth of a Virgin, and the Passion and Resurrection and bodily Ascension. After reciting these ✓

* See Wohlenberg, "Geboren von der Jungfrau Maria," p. 40.

and other articles of the Faith, Irenæus proceeds to remark that, "while the languages of the world differ, the tenor of the tradition is one and the same; and neither have the Churches situated in the regions of Germany believed otherwise, nor do they hold any other tradition, neither in the parts of Spain, nor among the Celts, nor in the East, nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor those which are situate in the middle parts of the world." Again, in a later part of his work (iii. 4) he speaks of the tradition which the Apostles had delivered to those whom they entrusted with the Churches, which accept the articles of the Faith mentioned above, and believe in One God, the Framers of heaven and earth and of all things that are in them, by Christ Jesus the Son of God, "Who for his surpassing love's sake towards His creatures submitted to the birth which was to be of the Virgin." *

* The Bishop of Worcester ("Dissertations," p. 44), in referring to the testimony of St. Irenæus, points out what special stress he lays upon the representation of two Churches—that of Rome, and that of the Church of St. Polycarp, Smyrna—who taught those things which he had learned from the Apostles. St. Irenæus dwells upon this

It may be noted in passing that the latest date to which we can refer the work of St. Irenæus (190 A.D.) is also the same date to which Professor Schmiedel has lately assigned the remarkable epitaph of Avircius of Hieropolis, the rediscovery of which we owe to Professor Ramsay.* From this epitaph we gain an invaluable picture of Church life and belief in the second century, and Ramsay strongly maintains that in one striking expression, where our Lord is spoken of as "the Fish from the fountain, mighty, pure, which a spotless Virgin grasped," we have a reference to His conception by a spotless Virgin. It must, however, be admitted that Bishop Lightfoot inclines to refer the Virgin to the Church ("Ignatius," i. 481), whilst Schmiedel apparently regards the expression as ambiguous ("Encycl. Biblica," ii. art. "Gospels," 1778). But if we prefer Professor Ramsay's interpreta-

testimony just before he mentions the various articles of the Creed, iii. 3, and he adds: "Yea, and the Church in Ephesus, having had both Paul for its founder and John to abide among them, is a true witness of the Apostles' tradition."

* *Expositor*, ix., pp. 264-272, Third Series; and Bishop Lightfoot's account, *Expositor*, i., p. 5, Third Series.

tion,* its significance is very great, since Avircius, no less than Irenæus, claims to describe the faith as it was held everywhere, in many and different lands ; Avircius had travelled east and west, and wherever he goes he finds fellow-worshippers in the same Church, and fellow-believers in the same faith. But without pressing this point of interpretation, we may add to St. Irenæus the great names of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, although in the latter the references are few. And to these, again, we may add the testimony of writers so varied as Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Lactantius, to say nothing of others.

Much has been made of the fact that the original Nicene Creed as accepted by the Council contained no allusion to the Virgin birth, and we are significantly told that the time may come when the original Creed of Nicæa may gain a hearing. But let us look into the matter for a moment. The Bishop who occupied the first seat at the Council of Nicæa, on the right of the Emperor, was Eusebius of Cæsarea ; he delivered the opening address, and his Creed, the Creed of

* See also Frankland, "Early Eucharist," p. 64 (1902).

the Church of Cæsarea, was first presented to the Council. But that Creed, so it is objected, made no mention of the Virgin birth. Yes; but does it follow that Eusebius denied it? We shall make a great mistake if we draw any such conclusion. The same Bishop, in writing against Marcellus within a few years of the Council, on the theology of the Church,* speaks in one and the same sentence of the birth from the holy Virgin, of the becoming Man, of the Suffering. Does not the true explanation lie in the fact that the Virgin birth was supposed—as it has been well said—to be *involved in* any statement of the Incarnation? It will be noticed that in the passage quoted from Eusebius' own writings the allusion is quite incidental; it evidently indicates, from its terms, a truth well known, and it places the Virgin birth and the Passion on the same level as historical facts. But may we not fairly ask, Why should the additional statement, "And was Incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary" present a

* The passage is quoted by the Bishop of Worcester in a note on p. 42, "Dissertations."

summoning-jurors to those who acknowledge that they are prepared to accept the Nicene Creed as it was adopted by the Council! To believe that Jesus Christ God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, was incarnate, and was made Man, involves a belief in a miracle or supernatural or supernaturalizing of other facts in the world's history, that the details connected with it are naturally surprising is on the ground that they are in their nature unique. Whatever difficulty these details may present, a still greater difficulty faces us in any attempt to withdraw the birth-right and their acceptance, apart from their truth.* It is quite beside the mark to maintain that the expression, "Born of

* In "*Incarnation Verbalis*," p. 35 we read: "We should not now require a priori that the Incarnate Logos would be born without a human father." But if the belief in the Virgin birth comes to us, as we maintain, from Jewish sources, there was no a priori expectation to this effect, and the only hypothesis which could be proved in support of it was not referred at the time of the Advent to the Messiah at all. See also Mr. Chase's criticism, "*Supernatural Element in our Lord's Earthly Life*," p. 33.

the Virgin Mary," is only symbolical of our Lord's unique purity and sinlessness (so apparently Lobstein and other modern writers). If this had been their purpose, we may ask, why should such words have been introduced at all? One might have supposed that it would have been easier and more intelligible, if we may judge from the standpoint of our opponents, to have said simply: "Who knew no sin" (2 Cor. v. 21), and we should then have had, at all events, an article of the Creed which rested upon an indisputable foundation, so far as the New Testament language is concerned.

Professor Schmiedel tells us that the Church attached the highest value to the doctrine of the Virgin birth. In one direction a value for this doctrine was sought in connecting it with the sinlessness of Jesus, although it was not until the doctrine of original sin had been fully developed that the theory of the Virgin birth became important with regard to Him (art. "Mary," *u.s.*, 2964). But if, according to Schmiedel, this important connection existed between the assertion of original sin on the one hand, and the doctrine

of a Virgin birth on the other, and if we remember that no one has asserted more emphatically than St. Paul the doctrine of original sin (although he does not use the precise phrase), and the implication of all men in Adam's fall, the strange thing would have been, as Schmiedel's words help to show us, if the Apostle had *not* regarded the birth of the one Sinless Man, as differing in some way from the ordinary propagation of a sinful race. Whilst, then, it is quite true that we cannot *prove* that the Virgin birth was known to St. Paul, it is none the less true that such a mode of birth accounts, and that, too, in a remarkable manner, for the Apostle's own language, and for the language of the early church—*e.g.* that of St. Irenæus ("Against Heresies," iii. 22 ; v. 1, 19). In modern days this connection between sinlessness and the birth of a virgin has been often emphasized, but in a different manner from that remarked upon by Dr. Schmiedel, who seems to think that the only logical outcome is the Roman doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.* Thus, Dr. Illingworth

* In this connection Dr. Orr has some valuable remarks

("Divine Immanence," p. 95), after pointing out that the real ground upon which the Virgin birth is rejected may be found in the *a priori* one of its intrinsic improbability, and that the tradition of the Early Church was that only by such an event could the sinful entail be broken, adds, "and that, too, at a time when the relation of body and soul was conceived as far less intimate than we now know it to be." "But," he continues, "with our modern knowledge of their mutual interdependence, it is doubly impossible to conceive that natural human generation should issue in anything else than a contaminated personality. It may be urged that we have no reason to think otherwise, even in the case of a virgin birth. But the cases are widely different. For of natural generation we have positive knowledge, based on universal experience, that it does, as a fact, issue in a sinful person. Whereas of virgin birth we have no positive knowledge; it is wholly outside our experience; we can only conjecture what its consequences would be."

in "The Miraculous Conception and Modern Thought," in "Ritschlianism," p. 237 (1903).

And in the absence of all knowledge, it is a perfectly conceivable conjecture that a mode of birth from which an essential factor of ordinary heredity is absent should involve independence from hereditary taint.*

This is a very different thing, of course, from any notion that sexual intercourse is in itself sinful—a notion which, in Dr. Schmiedel's opinion, was at work in the elaboration of the theory of the Virgin birth, and in support of which he quotes Rev. xiv. 4.

But if this passage exalts virginity, there are two considerations to be noted: First, that such teaching is insisted upon to counterbalance, as

* With these remarks we may compare those of Dr. Sanday, "The Meaning of the Virgin Birth," in Art. "Jesus Christ," Hastings' "Bibl. Dict.," ii. 646, also of Mr. Ottley, "Incarnation," in the same volume, p. 460, and those of the Bishop of Worcester, "Dissertations," p. 66, and "Romans," i., p. 300. To these references may be added, amongst English writers, Mr. Garvie's thoughtful paper on "The Virgin Birth," *Expositor*, February, 1902. In his book on "The Ritschlian Theology," pp. 208, 281, 290, Dr. Garvie has given us some interesting remarks on the attitude of Ritschl and Hermann towards the fact in question.

it were, the sensuality and carnal sins which had eaten into the life of more than one of the Churches; and, secondly, that in Rev. xxi., xxii., the holy institution of marriage receives both recognition and consecration from the imagery employed (see "Century Bible," *in loco*).

One other reason for the value attached by the Church to the doctrine in question may be best seen, in Schmiedel's judgment, in such a writer as Justin Martyr. This writer, we are told, is concerned to show the points of comparison between all that was alleged of so-called sons of Zeus and Jesus, the true Son of God, and he argues from these comparisons that there is so much common ground between Christian and heathen belief. "Such arguments," urges Schmiedel, "show us to what a level Jesus can be (not raised, but) lowered by the doctrine of the Virgin birth." It is a strange conclusion to deduce from any Christian writer, but it is arrived at by insisting upon points of *comparison* to the almost entire exclusion of points of *contrast*; by forgetfulness of the fact that Justin is keenly alive to, whilst he strongly

condemns, the grossness and license of the heathen mythology.

✓ But quite apart from these and similar criticisms, the object of the preceding pages has been to insist upon the evidence for the Virgin birth, and to show that no reasonable account can be given for a belief in that doctrine apart from its historical truth. It is not a pleasant or an encouraging task to look back upon chapters in the history of the Church, wherein men have endeavoured to transform the facts of the Creed into mere symbols for the expression of universal religious ideas.* From this perversion, which is no new danger and no new discovery, our English Prayer-Book may guard and protect us. In the Collect for Christmas Day we address God, Whose only-begotten has taken our nature upon Him, and Who was born of a pure Virgin. Here we have the statement of an historical fact; yet it is no dead fact, but a fact possessing "the power of an endless life": "Grant that we, being regenerate and made Thy children by adoption

* See, *e.g.*, the remarks of Hagenbach, "Kirchen geschichte," ii. p. 472.

and grace, may daily be renewed by Thy Holy Spirit." This is the spiritual truth. The historical fact is not forgotten, but it is the basis, not the symbol of the spiritual truth. It is not forgotten any more than it was in the days of St. Ignatius, who could place our Lord's Virgin birth as a fact side by side with His death, and could speak in the same chapter of the same letter ("Ephesians," xix.) of the results of that child-bearing of Mary: "From that time forward the ignorance of wickedness vanished away, when God appeared in the likeness of men unto newness of everlasting life."

To the historical fact of the Virgin birth the English Prayer-book bears witness, not only in our Christmas Collect, but in the morning Hymn of Praise—the triumph song of the Western Church—in which for century after century her children have rejoiced and been glad. The same testimony is again recorded in our most solemn Service of Thanksgiving, in Creed, and in Preface—one of the two Prefaces which first found a place in our first Book of Common Prayer. We are not asked to accept the Virgin birth—

at least primarily—as a spiritual or doctrinal truth, although undoubtedly there is a sense in which it becomes so, but as an historical fact; and that fact our Creeds, our Articles, and our Prayer-book proclaim with no uncertain sound.

Translate the facts of the Creed into terms of modern life if you please—in one sense they will bear it, for they form “a creed for every time and age”—but in the translation let us not lose sight of the importance and the truth of the original. Without keeping close to the original, there is always a danger in a translation.*

* In some recent numbers of the *Guardian* during March, Mr. F. C. Conybeare has made some remarkable observations, which seem to call for qualification, if not by himself, yet at least by those who are interested in the subject. Mr. Conybeare makes at least two assertions: (1) That the verses (Luke i. 34, 35) disappear in several of the most ancient witnesses; (2) that the “*Protevangelium Jacobi*” fails to bear witness to those verses. With regard to his first statement, which Mr. Conybeare describes as a commonplace of German criticism, he does not mention the fact that both verses are retained by at least two of the most distinguished of German textual critics in their recent editions of the third Gospel. When we turn to the

Evangelium secundum Lucam, edited by Dr. Blass, we find that although he is well aware of the reading of the Codex Veronensis, in which Mr. Conybeare places such absolute confidence, he retains the two verses in his text precisely as they are retained by Westcott and Hort. And if we turn to Dr. E. Nestle's recent edition of the Greek Testament (1901), we find that he retains the verses precisely as they are retained by the critics previously named. With regard to the second statement, Dr. Schmiedel, who would no doubt be ranked amongst the Germans to whom such deference is paid by Mr. Conybeare, informs us that in the "Protevangelium" an angel announces to Mary, during Joseph's absence from home, the birth of Jesus "in the words of Luke i. 35" ("Encycl. Biblica," iii. art. "Mary," 2967), and it is difficult to see how any one who reads the "Protevangelium," ch. xi., can reasonably doubt that the words of the angel are a distinct reminiscence of the same verse (see, e.g., Mr. Walker's translation in T. and T. Clark's "Apocryphal Gospels"). Other points adduced by Mr. Conybeare are fully answered by the rejoinders of Dr. Headlam. It is a pleasure in this connection to be able to quote Dr. Chase's words with regard to the verses under discussion: "I cannot think that there is a shadow of justification for regarding the question of Mary, 'How shall these things be?' and the answer of the angel, as an interpolation inserted in the story of St. Luke, and for thus eliminating the idea of the Virgin birth from the original narrative which St. Luke edited."—"Supernatural Element in our Lord's Earthly Life," etc., p. 18, 1903.

THE END.

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